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ABSTRACT

The effects of an extra-year transition program after kindergarten on fourth grade students' achievement and self-esteem levels were examined in this study using the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale and the Stanford Achievement Test. Fourth grade students from a school district in central Alabama who had participated in the extra-year program were compared to randomly selected fourth grade students who had not participated in the extra year program, students who had been referred to but not placed in the transition program, and retained students. The total sample consisted of 80 students. The transition program was planned according to Uphoff's (1990) characteristics of effective transition room programs to provide a "developmentally appropriate designed transition room" staffed by an experienced teacher. The findings indicated that the extra-year program did not have a significant impact on students' achievement. However, in contrast to the results of other studies reported in the literature, the self-esteem of fourth grade students who participated in the program was significantly higher than the self-esteem of nonparticipants. (HOD).

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The Effects of an Extra Year Program after Kindergarten on Students' School Achievement and Self-Esteem

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to assess the effects of an extra year program after kindergarten on fourth grade achievement and self-esteem. Measures of self-esteem were obtained by the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. Students' achievement was measured by the Stanford Achievement Test. Fourth grade students who had participated in the extra year program were compared to randomly selected fourth grade students who had not participated in the extra year program, referred-not-placed students, and retained students. The results were analyzed using an analysis of variance design. The findings of this study indicated that the extra year program did not have a significant impact on students' achievement. The self-esteem of fourth grade students who participated in the program was significantly higher than non-participants.

The Effects of an Extra Year Program after Kindergarten on Students' School Achievement and Self Esteem

According to Mantzicopoulos and Morrison (1992) retention rates are escalating despite the debate surrounding the effectiveness of the practice. Shephard and Smith (1990) estimated from their synthesis of research that between 5 and 7 percent of public school children are retained yearly which produces a cumulative failure rate of greater than 50%. One reason for the continued practice of retention is the popularity of the policy among the public, teachers, and administrators. One survey in a large school district reported that 59% of the citizens, 65% of the teachers and 74% of the administrators supported a retention policy (House, 1991). Since researchers (e.g., House, 1991; Nason, 1991; Shepard & Smith, 1990; Sklarz, 1989; Smith & Shepard, 1987) have consistently reported that the single largest cause for students dropping out of high school is grade level retention, it is poignant to study the effectiveness of promotion policies and alternatives to retention.

Research

Achievement

Most teachers and administrators support retention as an

effective means of improving students' academic achievement and social immaturity (House, 1991; Nason, 1991; Shepard & Smith, 1987); however research has not documented the effectiveness of the practice. Mantzicopoulos and Morrison (1992) analyzed the results of 53 children who were retained at kindergarten and matched to a group of 53 promoted children. Students who were retained demonstrated an academic advantage during the second year of kindergarten; however, this advantage was not maintained past kindergarten. The retained students scored the same means on a reading achievement test in first grade as their promoted peers in first grade using same-age comparisons and same-grade comparisons.

Shepard and Smith (1987) reported similar results in their study of 40 retained kindergarten children who were matched to 40 promoted children. By the end of the first grade there were no differences between the two groups on a mathematics achievement test or teacher ratings of the students' reading achievement, mathematics achievement, social maturity level, self-concept level, and attention level. However, the retained children did score higher on a reading achievement test than did their matched peers.

A synthesis of research on retention by Shepard and Smith (1990) which included over 100 studies found that retained children actually perform more poorly on average when they go on to

the next grade then [than] if they had been promoted without repeating a grade" (p. 86). Nason (1991) also reviewed the literature and concluded that "a majority of the retention on research reports a negative effect. Retention in kindergarten or first grade does not produce long-lasting academic gains, but rather increases the likelihood that a student will become a high school dropout" (p. 302).

Rihl (1988) suggested that the lack of academic success of retained children could result from the repetition of a program that was not successful the first time and may be equally or less successful the second time. One alternative to repeating the same grade with the same instructional materials and strategies is the transition room concept which provides an extra year of school between kindergarten and first grade. Uphoff (1990) contends that students experiencing transition room programs instead of repeating kindergarten "encounter new curriculum especially designed to provide them with developmentally appropriate practice which can lead to success in school, confidence in self, and a positive attitude toward learning" (p. 3). Children are referred to the transition room program based on predetermined criteria and parents are usually given the option to decline the services of the program. Since transition rooms are a special case of retention and are designed

to allow extra time for development, the research findings are reported separately.

According to Nason (1991), while the number of transition rooms has been increasing, the effectiveness of the program has not been established because of the limited studies conducted in the school systems. Gredler (1984) synthesized the research on transition rooms and concluded "that transition room children either do not perform as well or at most are equal in achievement levels to transition room eligible children placed in the regular classroom" (p. 469). In only one study was the reading achievement of the transition room children in first grade higher than the reading achievement of the regular children; however, by the third grade the difference was diminished. The research synthesis did indicate limited evidence that transition room children out performed children who had been retained. Gredler (1984) also found that the less experienced teachers were usually assigned to the transition rooms and limited opportunities were provided for students to improve their reading skills.

Leinhardt (1980) documented the progress of transition room children and children referred-not-placed in transition rooms. The referred-not-placed children outperformed the transition room children. Leinhardt suggested a replication of the study because of

the difference in instructional strategies of the two groups. The referred-not-placed children received a specialized instructional curriculum and more instructional reading time than the transition room students.

Self-Esteem

The effects of retention on a child's self-esteem has been a topic of concern for educators. The majority of available studies on the topic have used parent and child interviews as the primary instrument of data collection. After analyzing the results of over 50 studies measuring the effects of grade retention on self-esteem, Shepard and Smith (1990) concluded that both long-term and short-term effects reveal "extra-year children are more likely to have lower self-concepts and poorer attitudes toward school compared to controls" (p. 87). Nason's (1991) review of the research concurred that "a child's self-esteem is negatively affected when retention is utilized" (p. 302). Gredler (1984) summarized the results of transition room children and self-esteem: "Central to all transition room programs are the strong feelings and attitudes of the teachers that such a program will definitely enhance the child's self-concept" (p. 465); however, these feelings and attitudes were not supported in the studies. One study compared the scores

between transition room children and referred-not-placed children on a self-esteem inventory. The transition room children scored lower than the referred-not-placed children; however, the long term effects of self-esteem were not investigated.

Much of the existing research has focused on early grade retention or transition rooms with inappropriate instructional strategies and/or inexperienced teachers. According to Uphoff (1990), all transition room programs are not effective and there are some essential characteristics of good programs including the following:

> The extra-year comes before personal failure is experienced by the individual child. Parents participate fully in the data-gathering and act as the final decision makers. Small class size (12-15) is maintained. Non-tracking, flexible exit and progression policies are used. Learning experiences are based on developmentally appropriate curricula. Multi-factored assessments are used. (p. 2)

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to assess the effects of a developmentally appropriate designed transition room program utilizing an experienced teacher on fourth grade achievement and self-esteem levels.

Method

Sample

The sample for this study was the only elementary school in one school district in central Alabama. The system has a total enrollment of 1,574 with 585 students in the elementary school which includes grades kindergarten through fourth. Approximately 42% of the elementary students participate in the free or reduced lunch program and 81% of the students are white and 19% nonwhite. The school system initiated a transition room program in 1981 to identify and assist potential high school dropouts. Students are identified in the spring of their kindergarten year and parents have the option of placing the child in the transition room program or promoting the child to the first grade. The transition room program utilizes a developmentally appropriate curriculum with an emphasis on whole language approach to reading. The curriculum is different from the kindergarten and first grade curricula and extra attention is devoted to the enhancement of the child's self-esteem. The enrollment is limited to 15 students. Children remain in the program an entire year and progress to the first grade. The same teacher has taught the class since the inception of the program. All students who had been referred and placed in a transition room program after kindergarten, all

students who had been referred-not-placed in the transition room, and all students who had been retained and were enrolled in the fourth grade in the spring of 1992 were included in the study. Also, a random sample of 46 students who had not been referred, placed or retained (regular program) were included in the study.

Several descriptive indices were computed on the sample and the results are summarized in Tables 1, 2, and 3. The total sample consisted of 80 students with 49% female and 51% male. The racial composition of the sample was consistent with the distribution of the school population with 83% white and 17% non-white. The transition room students were majority (85%) males, but the other groups were more equally distributed with 40% males in the referred-not-placed group, 56% males in the retained group, and 41% males in the regular program group. Retained and Transition Room students were older than the referred-not-placed and regular program students.

Insert Tables 1, 2, and 3 about here

Instrumentation

Two instruments were used in this research: The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (Piers, 1991) and the Stanford Achievement Test, eighth edition. "The Piers-Harris is an 80-item, self-report questionaire designed to assess how children and adolescents feel about themselves" (Piers, 1991, p. 1). Internal consistency coefficients of .88 to .92 were reported for students in grades 3-6 and correlations between the Piers-Harris total score and other measures of self-concept ranged from .32 to .85. The total score is reported as a T-score with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10 (Piers, 1991). The Stanford Achievement Test is a nationally normed (1988) achievement test.

Method

Sample

The Stanford Achievement Test was administered to all fourth grade students in April, 1992. The Piers-Harris was administered in small groups to all fourth grade students in May, 1992. Following the administration of both instruments, students in the regular program were randomly selected to be included in the study. All students who had been placed in the transition room, referred-not-placed, and retained were included in the study.

Data Analyses

The four groups (transition room, referred-not-placed, retained, and regular program) were compared on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) and the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure using the Normal Curve Equivalent scores on the Basic Battery subtest of the SAT was used to compare students' school achievement. An ANOVA procedure was also used to compare the students' Total Self-Concept T-score on the Piers-Harris. The statistical information was analyzed using the Statistical Analysis System's (SAS) general linear model (Freund, Littel, & Spector, 1986). The homogeneity of variance assumption for the two ANOVA procedures was tested and not violated.

Results

The four groups did not differ significantly ($p \leq .01$) on achievement level as measured by the Basic Battery. The mean NCE score for the transition room students was 57.1, regular program students was 53.5, referred-not-placed students was 47.0, and retained students was 45.1. While the mean for the transition room students was higher, it was not significantly higher. Tables 4 and 5 show the results of the analysis. The calculated F was 1.88 with a probability level of .14.

Insert Tables 4 and 5 about here

The four groups did differ significantly, however, on the self-concept measure. The calculated F value of 4.64 resulted in significance at a probability level of .0049. The mean Total-T scores were the following: transition room students, 68.2; regular program students, 56.8; referred-not-placed students, 54.8; and retained students, 54.4. (See Table 6 and 7) The results were then further analyzed using Tukey's HSD test with harmonic mean. The transition room students had significantly higher self-esteem scores than the regular program students, referred-not-placed students, and retained students. These results are reported in Table 8.

Insert Tables 6, 7, and 8 about here

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of a developmentally appropriate transition room program on students' achievement level and self-concept at the end of the fourth grade.

While the transition room students had a higher mean achievement score than regular program students, referred-not-placed students, and retained students; the mean was not significantly higher. Also, the transition room students were older than the regular program and referred-not-placed students. The results of this study indicated that there were no benefit for transition room students or retained students in academic progress. This finding was consistent with the literature on retention and transition room students.

The transition room students had significantly higher self-esteem scores than any other groups. All the groups, however, had mean scores at or above the average. These results were in contrast to the reported literature summaries. One explanation for the contradictory results of this study was the use of a self-esteem inventory rather than an interview format and the extended time period from retention to testing. While students may report negative attitudes concerning retention, the event may not negatively effect their self-concept over an extended period of time. Also, the transition room students and in the study were exposed to a curriculum that promoted the development of a positive self-concept.

Further monitoring of the transition room program will assist systems in developing practices that are appropriate for students.

A study that controls for chronological age and ability level of students would provide beneficial information to school systems. The researchers of this study are considering modifications to their present transition room program that would allow for flexible exit or promotion to second grade instead of first grade at the end of the transition room program.

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Table 1

Sex and Race of Fourth Grade Sample

SEX			RACE		
	Number	Percent		Number	Percent
Female	39	49%	White	66	83%
Male	41	51%	Non-White	14	17%
Total	80	100%	Total	80	100%

Table 2

Description of Sample

Group		Numbers	Percent
Transition Room	Males	11	85%
	Females	2	15%
	Total	13	100%
Referred Not Placed	Males	2	40%
	Females	3	60%
	Total	5	100%
Retained	Males	9	56%
	Females	7	44%
	Total	16	100%
Regular Program	Males	19	41%
	Females	27	59%
	Total	46	100%

Table 3

Age of Fourth Grade Sample

Group	Number	Mean Age	Standard Deviation
Transition Room	13	10.9	.34
Referred Not Placed	5	10.2	.56
Retained	16	11.2	.57
Regular Program	46	10.1	.38

Table 4

Basic Battery Achievement Score Means

Group	N	Mean	SD
Transition	10	57.1	9.7
Referred-not-placed	4	47.0	12.8
Regular Program	46	53.5	14.9
Retained	12	45.1	10.8

Table 5

Summary of ANOVA for Basic Battery

Source	DF	SS	MS	F	P
Model	3	1037.9	345.9	1.88	.1415
Error	68	12527.3	184.2		
Total	71	13565.3			

Table 6

Self-Esteem Score Means

Group	N	Mean	SD
Transition	13	68.2	9.1
Referred-not-Placed	5	54.8	11.3
Regular Program	46	56.8	10.7
Retained	16	54.4	12.7

TAble 7

Summary of ANOVA for Self-Esteem Inventory

Source	DF	SS	MS	F	P
Model	3	1657.6	552.5	4.64	.0049
Error	76	9041.0	118.9		
Total	79	10698.7			

Table 8

Mean Differences by Group for Self-Esteem

	Transition -68.2	Regular 56.8	Referred 54.8	Retained 54.4
Transition	-	11.30*	13.4*	13.7*
Regular	-	-	2.0	.4
Referred			-	.4
Retained				-

NOTE: Significant difference values were identified as *, $p \leq .05$.

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